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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9219
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1489
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1666
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0028
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000857

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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION CONTINUES: OVER 45 ERITREANS
ARRESTED

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (C) In an October 29 meeting with Poloff, Reverend Zecharias Abraham (strictly protect) relayed the story of an attempted escape by Mussie Issa, founder of the evangelical group, Youth for Christ, and the subsequent arrests of 45 of his supporters. According to Rev. Zecharias, officials from the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) Office of National Security arrested Mussie at his home during the last week in September, detaining him for the night in a National Security office in the Tiravolo neighborhood of Asmara. Befriending the elderly night guard, Mussie managed to escape. He stole through the neighborhood to the home of a friend and fellow church member's father. The father, a relative of Rev. Zecharias and local pharmacy owner, gave Mussie some clothes and 1000 nakfa and drove him early that morning to the bus station. Mussie then managed to travel to Adi Keyh and then on to his home village near Senafe in southern Eritrea near the Ethiopian border. There he found refuge for several days until the Office of National Security tracked him down. The National Security officials re-arrested him, beating him severely. The officials returned him to Asmara, where he is reportedly being detained in an investigation center also run by the Office of National Security.

¶2. (C) Mussie is a former member of the Kale Hiwot Church. With the church's blessing, he left the Kale Hiwot church in 2005 and founded the Eritrean chapter of Youth for Christ. He was an active missionary who traveled extensively within Eritrea encouraging young people to join his Christian organization. He interpreted broadly the mission of Youth for Christ extending membership to older individuals and essentially anyone who wished to join. He was eager and energetic in his membership campaign.

¶3. (C) Prior to and following his arrest, National Security officials searched his home. Unfortunately, Mussie was careless with securing his records, and the officials were able to obtain a list of his religious supporters. From that list, and by tracking down those who assisted Mussie in his attempted escape, the officials initiated a spate of arrests, detaining over forty-five individuals during the first week of October. Rev. Zecharias' relative, who assisted Mussie in

leaving Asmara, was one of the first arrested. Mussie's father, wife and three children were detained when the Office of National Security learned of his escape from detention. His wife and children were released when Mussie was re-arrested. His father, a former fighter during Eritrea's struggle for independence, remains in detention. According to Rev. Zecharias, membership in Youth for Christ exceeds 700 individuals and the arrests continue. Most of the detainees are being held in Police Station Number Five in Asmara.

¶4. (C) Comment: The persecution of members of religious organizations in Eritrea has sadly become a way of life. The GSE shows no signs of changing their modus operandi and post anticipates these kinds of detentions will continue. End Comment
MCINTYRE